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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a study that examined the concept of trust-a critical element in the social glue that bonds the organizational team together and enables effective collective action in schools. It delineates an organizational context for consideration of the concept of trust in interactions in restructured schools. The study suggests that the benefits of teams and collective action under new circumstances of school governance manifest within flattened organizations with extended authorities and responsibilities. Additionally, the report sets forth a series of testable propositions associated with trust and teamwork, which may serve as foci for future research. There is convincing support for the position that successful collective action continues to depend on trust among individuals in voluntary activities targeted to the achievement of collective purposes. The study suggests the utility of both instrumental and noninstrumental views and the need to integrate conceptually these perspectives as people seek to understand better this complex phenomenon in the context of team-based systems of restructured schools. (Contains 7 pages of references.) (DFR)

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TEAMS, TEAMWORK AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

IN RESTRUCTURED SCHOOLS

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TEAMS, TEAMWORK AND COLLECTIVE ACTION IN SELF-MANAGED SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

Teams are units that share authority and responsibility, including leadership responsibility. Each member of a team assumes both individual and team accountability and responsibility. Teams are not, however, just groups of people. Teams "include individuals who make choices, reveal preferences and perform actions" (Reisman, 1990, p. 1); but they do so in the team context where purposive self-interest and calculative rationality are constrained within a context of interdependence, convention and uncertainty.

Teams may behave in a collective, "teamlike" manner, or be little more than temporally convenient groups of individuals with divergent interests and very little commonality among them (Henkin & Wanat, 1994; Kinlaw, 1991; Willard, 1992).

Teams can be powerful cohorts when members are competent, motivated, and communicative, and work in unison toward common goals (Lumsden & Lumsden, 1993). Trust, communication and collaborative skills are essential elements in teamwork, and function as mediators of team success. Trust is an especially important element in the collective action or teamwork equation, since it functions as a substitute for control, reflects individuals' attitudes about others' motives, and can broaden the bandwidth of functional interaction in collaborative relationships (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998). The cultivation and maintenance of trust among team members are difficult, never-ending processes which require strong, steady support from both members and leaders.

The trust construct may be viewed at individual, organizational, and cultural levels as a social behavior in social context rather than as an individual, rational behavior in a single-period transaction. Here, trust as a social, non-instrumental behavior is affected by positive experiences, organizational actions and structures, and by differences in cultures (low-trust vs. high-trust cultures) that are organizationally embedded and may confer organizational advantage or disadvantage.

Rousseau and associates (1998) suggested a synthesized definition of trust derivative of multi-disciplinary research on the subject. "Trust", they posited, "is a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another" (p. 395). Trust involves risk, dependency, confidence, and expectation. Organizations, assertedly, can be designed to enhance trustworthiness by creating structures that make trusting successful. Team-based, restructured schools, prominently represented in American education, may be included among these organizations. The importance of relational trust in schools is suggested, time and again, in descriptive and empirical studies of school reform (Elmore, 1993; Pounder, 1998; Rossow & Zager, 1989). The significance of trust-based interpersonal and organizational relationships among key actors in local schools with participative decisional systems is continually reinforced by an assumption asserting that "The people who work most closely with children should be the ones who make the critical decisions governing not only how a school is run, but also what a student learns, how, and in what time frames and settings" (Chion-Kenney, 1994, p. 2). Building and maintaining trust appears to be viewed as particularly important in school districts where the tradition, formerly, may have been one of top-heavy authority and control (low trust) rather than respect and support of front-line

workers (high trust) (Rossow & Zager, 1989).

Confirmation that productive school community relationships are based on interpersonal trust is made explicit in excerpts from the publication of the first school in Hawaii to implement school/community based management almost a decade ago:

> School/Community-Based Management is based on faith and trust in people. It is the meeting of minds and hearts, coming together to create a community of learners, dialoguing, forming a common language, checking our perceptions, debating, sometimes disagreeing, but always focusing on the common base of what is best for students and their learning.
>
> Through the collaborative process, each participant comes away changed in some way by the group effort and interaction. It's a process which cannot operate within a strict set of rules or a tight structure. Through its inherent ambiguity, it forces participants to be more involved and innovative (Chion-Kenney, 1994, p. 45).

The purpose of this study is to examine the concept of trust; a critical element in the social glue that binds the organizational team together, and enables effective collective action in schools. To achieve this purpose, we delineate an organizational context for consideration of the concept of trust in interactions in restructured schools. Then, we suggest the importance of teams and collective action under new circumstances of school governance manifest within flattened organizations with extended authorities and responsibilities. Finally, we set forth a series of testable propositions associated with trust and teamwork, which may serve as foci for future research.

THE ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

School restructuring within a movement toward school reform assumes major

organizational change including devolution of significant authorities to the local school site. Models of reform extend traditional conceptualizations of key school personnel to include community groups and referent publics, and envision committed teachers, administrators, and parents working together to achieve common purposes (Conley, Schmidle, & Schedd, 1988; Murphy, 1991; Sizer, 1992). The school as an organization is significantly changed.

It is important to distinguish between changes in and changes of an organization. When relatively few people and a relatively small portion of an organization, are involved in change, we are witnessing minimally pervasive changes in an organization. "When the organization's structure itself is changed," the case in authentic school-based management models, "the communication networks and power structures are changed, more organizational members are involved, and their status, positions, and roles are altered" (Zey-Ferrell, 1979, p. 263). Here, we are dealing with highly pervasive changes of an organization. Resources are transferred from a central source to the local school or point of service delivery. Decisions that directly affect students -- especially those related to teaching and learning -- are made by teachers and local administrators, working together with parents and community members at confluences of mutual concern and interest. These evolving school environments may be characterized as emerging systems of beliefs with varying perceptions of reality (Weick, 1979). Changes of organization are expected to contribute to improved teaching and learning, and higher potential for student life success (Keefe, 1992).

The literature on complex organizations is informative in terms of providing a framework for consideration of trust and trust relationships in self-managed schools. A central notion or expectation of reform from the perspective of organizational models of adaptive change is that

schools will change their structures and strategies so that they may adapt to new organizational blueprints, which facilitate flexibility (Carroll & Harrison, 1993; Hannan & Freeman, 1977; Perrow, 1986; Zey-Ferrell, 1979). Put simply, these organizations, like many others, change to adapt to new circumstances and avoid strategic paralysis (D'Aveni, 1989), and to insure continued support and survival. Underlying assumptions supporting this perspective suggest that organizations, including schools, are able to implement radical transformations with success, and benefit from increased flexibility. These assumptions have been challenged as unrealistic (Hannan & Freeman, 1984), since many organizations may be unable to adjust their blueprints in a timely manner. Schools may lag, at a dysfunctional distance, behind changes in their larger social environments. Research suggests, moreover, that organizational failure rates actually may increase after organizations implement major structural change (Amburgey, Kelley, & Barnett, 1993; Haveman, 1990); especially where changes in the organizational blueprint amount to replacement of core features of the organization. Here, changes extend substantially beyond the bounds of adaptation. "Organizational change tends to 'reset the clock', it exposes the organization to the 'liability of newness'" (Swaminathan & Delacroix, 1991, p. 681).

While it is not our intent to suggest the point at which changes or reforms may constitute replacement of one organizational blueprint with another, we do suggest that extensive structural and strategic changes can interrupt the traditional inertia of these social institutions enacted at the organizational level, as well as at the levels of key actors and/or dominant coalitions in the school (Robbins, 1993). Altering organizational forms and traditional modus operandi upsets social and political equilibria, which may lead, at times, to decisions to forego planned reorganization rather than pay the related costs of change (Hannan & Freeman, 1989). Changing organizational

blueprints is neither easy, nor likely to succeed without accompanying changes in the behavioral repertoires and relationships of key actors.

Initial implementation research on school reform, targeted to loosening central office controls and encouraging initiatives and activity at the local school level, suggests mixed results in terms of benefits that may be associated with organizational and programmatic change (Bryk, 1999; Cistone, Fernandez, & Tornillo, 1989; Litow, 1999). In Chicago, for example, preliminary findings of studies suggest that some schools involved in significant reorganization "made progress in improving academic achievement" (Bryk, 1999, p. 79), the ultimate test of success, while others were "left behind by reform" (p. 81). In more successful local schools, strategic decisions focused on three general concerns: "strengthening the connections between school professionals and the parents and community the school serves; creating a more student-centered climate that was safe and orderly and combined a sense of personalism with a strong academic press; and enhancing the knowledge and skills of individual teachers and improving their capacity to work collectively. Tying this all together is an expanding relational trust among all adults that aims at advancing the education and welfare of children" (p. 81).

TEAMS AND COLLECTIVE ACTION IN LOCALLY CONTROLLED SCHOOLS

Organizational arrangements in self-managed schools are distinguished by the extent to which they generally rely on team organization. The omnipresence of team organization in these schools appears to suggest new expectations in terms of work style, and a reconceptualization of interpersonal relationships within increasingly atomized organizations divided into small work groups (Koteen, 1991). Teams as managerial configurations in education have been recognized

as forces for continuous improvement in quality (Savary, 1992; Schlechty, 1997; Wiedmer & Harris, 1997), and "the single most important way to deal with the problems currently facing public schools" (Scarr, 1982, p. 50). They serve as structures useful for mediating problems of disorder, and for dealing with exceptional as well as permanent tasks; especially where the latter involve creative, innovative, and problem-solving processes (Donnellon, 1996; Henkin & Wanat, 1994).

Teams may be defined by certain distinguishing characteristics; specifically, collaborative goals, collective work relationships, and integrative thinking; supported, ostensibly, by open communication, by opportunities for learning while doing, and by interpersonal trust (Fisher & Ellis, 1990; Gouran & Hirokowa, 1996; Larson & LaFasto, 1989). Teams have been recognized as strategic means for implementing delegated authority, and for processing more information at lower levels (Bradford & Cohen, 1984; Macy, 1986). The participation of education professionals and school administrators in groups or teams has been associated with positive changes in terms of individual attitudes and organizational performance (Conley, Schmidle & Schedd, 1988; Lindelow, Coursen, Mazzarella, Heynderickz, & Smith, 1989). Teams, assertedly, produce more ideas and synergism, boost morale, and serve the causes of efficient and effective learning (Maeroff, 1993).

Despite high levels of enthusiasm for, and confidence in teamwork, the challenges and problems of collective action enacted through teams persist. Dynamics of interactions in diverse groupings in local schools -- where there may be differential interests in the processes and outcomes of education (Olson, 1965) -- can significantly affect the course of collective action. Research on teams and teamwork in education and organizational development (Cooper &

Conley, 1991; Henkin & Wanat, 1994; Senge, 1990; Sizer, 1992) suggest that teamwork in school environments may be impacted, significantly, by interpersonal relationships and organizational conditions that may discourage or encourage generative learning and expansive patterns of effectiveness. Decades of inquiry into phenomena associated with cooperation and collective action suggest, simply put, that it is far easier to conceptualize the ideal of collective action through teamwork than to induce individuals to contribute to common causes when self-interested actions would be more immediately beneficial (Elster, 1989; Glance & Huberman, 1993).

TRUST AND TEAMWORK

School reform as change may be viewed as a conscious, deliberate, and collaborative effort to improve the operations of a human system (Bennis, Benne & Chin, 1969). It is an effort to radically modify or change organizational modus operandi, authority structures, program activities, and the normative culture of an operating enterprise -- the school -- usually allowing no down-time for adjustments in terms of the attitudes and behavioral repertoires of school personnel. Reports of experience with school restructuring and reform have provided us with some instructive lessons about participants and change. Research on restructuring and change involving a large urban school district (Lieberman, 1991) suggests that interactions in the process of change are as important as the substance of change. Participants in change processes may, or may not, gain skills essential for the development of productive relationships. Teams involving parents, teachers, administrators, and community members may, or may not, build essential trust-based relational repertoires as they deal, concurrently, with a series of immediate and long-range

problems.

The significance of trust as a factor in the cohesiveness and effectiveness of teams in restructured schools is not well understood (Ellis & Fouts, 1994; Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995). Trust is an elusive concept. The "link between trust and organizational features -- such as structure, formal role relations, or task characteristics -- only has begun to be examined systematically" (Sitkin & Stickel, 1998, p. 196). Flattened organizational structures and distributed authorities of self-managed schools suggest the range of circumstances in which the level of trust, viewed as faith or confidence in others under a set of circumstances (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995), may fluctuate and mediate the course and outcomes of interpersonal transactions and collective action (Donnellon, 1996; Fox, 1974; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Zand, 1997). Teams in these organizational environments must deal, concurrently, with interpersonal dimensions of trust and with interdependencies involving individuals and groups in the larger social system where the collateral of established and maintained trust relationships are paramount (Hackman, 1990). In schools, team members themselves may have difficulty, at times, differentiating between the source and object of trust; that is, whether they have more faith and confidence in the competence and good will of other members, or in the school in which the transactions take place (Bachmann, 1998).

Affective Trust

Trustworthiness may be viewed, like honesty and fairness, as an end value. When trustworthiness functions as an end-value, it is universally desirable, may be intrinsically motivating for team members, and may be instrumental in terms of the performance of followers

(Hallam & Campbell, 1992). Trust may be conceptualized, alternatively, as reliance on the good will of others: a circumstance which makes the individual vulnerable to the good will of another person or others. The willingness to expose oneself to the good will of others, say members of a school team, acknowledges the essence of trust as confidence that others will not do harm to the individual (Baier, 1986). Trust predicated on good will extends beyond simply relying on the dependable habits and customary practices of others.

Trust in organizational interactions has been defined in terms of a set of beliefs characterized as both subjective and optimistic (Cummings & Bromiley, 1996). Trust reduces transaction costs within and between organizations at all levels and is predicated on an individual's or team's belief that another individual, or team "(a) makes a good-faith effort to behave in accordance with any commitments both explicit or implicit, (b) is honest in whatever negotiations preceded such commitments, and (c) does not take excessive advantage of another even when the opportunity is available" (Cummings & Bromiley, 1996, p. 303).

Calculative Trust

There appears to be some convergence in definitions of trust viewed in terms of subjective probability of performance, or as a threshold point located on a probabilistic distribution. "When we say we trust someone or that someone is trustworthy, we implicitly mean that the probability that he will perform an action that is beneficial or at least not detrimental to us is high enough for us to consider engaging in some form of cooperation with him" (Gambetta, 1988, p. 217). Kinlaw (1991) sets forth the kinds of trust-related behaviors associated with superior work teams. Trust on these teams is linked to the concept of subjective probability of

performance, and asserts a level of mutual confidence and benevolence among members who:

- do what they say they are going to do;
- are sometimes painfully straightforward and never conceal information from each other that they feel their colleagues should have;
- can be depended on because they are viewed by their colleagues as having the knowledge and skills to perform;
- are willing to listen to each other and to defer to each other because they expect reliable information and good ideas from each other (Kinlaw, 1991, p. 122).

PROPOSITIONS

Individual Propensity to Trust

Effective teamwork depends on trust. Trust depends on trust already existing. Donnellon (1996) suggested the paradox of trust in teams with limited, or no prior history. How can individuals who join a team be expected to trust other team members before they get to know them? How can an individual anticipate how they may respond? In zero-history teams, there is no way for a team member to know, with any degree of confidence, if other individuals are dependable, knowledgeable about the work to be done, dedicated to the goals and tasks of the team, and/or able to maintain a confidence (Drexler, Sibbit, & Forrester, 1988). Generalized expectancies held by an individual that other individuals can be relied upon (Rotter, 1980), considered in the context of zero-history teams, are related, for the most part, to individual propensity to trust (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Here, trust is associated with a set of optimistic expectations on the part of the trustor in terms of motives and performance of others, and on a willingness to make oneself vulnerable based on those expectations (Barber, 1983;

Lewicki & Bunker, 1998; Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995).

Proposition 1. Trust among team members with limited or no prior history will emerge, initially, on the basis of individuals' propensity to trust.

Interaction History

Many teams have members with some prior history of interaction. Prior interaction and social exchange tend to create trust between people and advance the course of integration into social groups (Blau, 1964). In teams, intensive group discussions, consultations, and interactions, including opportunities to disagree and engage in constructive conflicts which give rise to new norms (Coser, 1956), can enable group integration, the development of common codes of cooperation, and trust (Blau, 1955, 1964; Earle & Cvetkovich, 1995). Trust has both expectation and behavioral components, and cooperative orientation, assertedly, affects both (Gambetta, 1988). Meeker (1984) suggested that cooperative orientation should increase both the degree to which people expect to reciprocate, and the degree to which people actually repay help with help. In schools with stable personnel patterns, sequences of events involving reciprocal exposure and reinforcement can enable the establishment and development of relationships of mutual trust; assuming there is accumulated memory of previous encounters (Dasgupta, 1988). Iterated patterns of reciprocation and continually expanding exchange may be "accompanied by a parallel growth of mutual trust" (Blau, 1964, p. 94).

Proposition 2. Levels of mutual trust in teams are conditioned by iterated patterns of interaction where common codes of cooperation develop, by cooperative orientations, and by accumulated perceptions and memory of experiences involving reciprocity in exchange.

Time

Lorenz (1988) observed that time is a critical element in deciding whether to trust. Hackett (1997) suggested that the only solution to lack of trust and lack of communication is time for the team to develop. Trust and open communication can be encouraged over time where individuals are dependable, pitch in and help their colleagues, and are straightforward and candid in sharing their views and encouraging others to do the same (Varney, 1989). Team members, over time, can discover the process of trusting, and strengthen relationships in the group so that they feel trustable (Smith & Berg, 1987). Frequent personal contact among team members over extended periods of time, moreover, can facilitate individual ability to adapt to contingencies in the course of future interactions by allowing for an easier exchange of information (Lorenz, 1988).

While administrators may encourage increased cooperation within complex systems of coordinated action in team-based organizations, including restructured schools, they may fail to understand how individuals experience trust in another person, and how trust evolves over time (Jones & George, 1998). Team members are expected to trust each other without adequate time or opportunity to confirm perceptions about how others may respond. They must trust one another, yet remain vigilant at the same time (Donnellon, 1996).

Proposition 3. Teams are more likely to derive the benefits of mutual trust relationships when members are given the time and opportunities needed to establish sound, trust-based foundations for effective cooperation.

Team Composition

Team composition is one of the variables commonly associated with team effectiveness

and trust among members (Magjuka & Baldwin, 1991; Morgan & Bowers, 1995; Sundstrom, DeMeuse, & Futrell, 1990). Team composition refers to the relative homogeneity or heterogeneity of the group. Homogeneity or heterogeneity in groups, alone, is insufficient to assure high levels of team effectiveness or trust among team members (Morgan & Bowers, 1995). Objective similarities between team members, however, can influence the initial development of trust. Similar interests and abilities as well as similar personal characteristics can enable and accelerate the establishment of trust-based working group relationships (McAllister, 1995). Heterogeneity in team composition, in contrast, has been identified as a potential stressor of teamwork (Morgan & Bowers, 1995). Heterogeneous teams are challenged, initially, to develop the spontaneity of communication that characterizes teams with high trust levels (Drexler, Sibbet & Forrester, 1988). Heterogeneity in team composition, however, may decrease conformity and facilitate critical analyses of issues and alternative choices, and limit the potential for team under-performance because of individual member's and/or group unwillingness to critically scrutinize and challenge less desirable alternatives (Morgan & Bowers, 1995).

Proposition 4. Team composition is likely to mediate the establishment of trust, the development of working group relationships, and the quality of team performance.

Team Norms

Norms and values provide the means for regulating group behavior and enabling coordination and efficiency (Hackman, 1990; Sitkin & Roth, 1995). Team members may develop shared values, beliefs, and assumptions, and incorporate them as generally desirable ends -- such as loyalty, helpfulness and fairness -- into a value system where they are prioritized

in terms of their relative importance as guiding principles. Guiding principles impact member behaviors, serve to hold a team together, and facilitate the maintenance of trust (Lumsden & Lumsden, 1993). Trust may be maintained where each team member's key values are synchronous with those of the rest of the group. Trust serves to maintain and express the shared values that trust originates from, and shared values help to create relationships characterized by trust (Barber, 1983).

Proposition 5. Team members' propensities to trust will be strengthened and maintained in organizations where there are mutually accepted guiding principles that encourage interpersonal trust and individual trustworthiness.

Expressive and Cognitive Functions

In teams, expectations about the trustworthiness of others are particularly relevant, since "the completion of one's own consequential activities [often] depends on the prior action or co-operation of another person" (Lane & Bachmann, 1998, p. 2). A formidable obstacle to becoming a "real" team involves a willingness to take the risks necessary for developing trust and interdependence (Katzenback & Smith, 1993). The experience of trust involves decisions that an individual makes when she/he decides whether or not to trust another person. Affective state and personal feelings toward a particular individual are major determinants in decisions to trust (Morris, 1989; Nowlis, 1970; Schwartz & Clore, 1988). The importance of affect in the trust equation is suggested, furthermore, by evidence (Frijda, 1988; Schwartz & Clore, 1988) that moods and emotions impact experiences of trust by providing individuals with signals indicating fluctuations in their ongoing experiences of trust with other persons. Thoughts and feelings people have about other people and the means through which they define and structure their

interactions with others emerge from affective states and attitudes viewed as knowledge structures (Anderson & Armstrong, 1989; Olson & Zanna, 1993). Team members' willingness to take risks and expose their vulnerabilities impacts both the processes and quality of teamwork, and depends, in part, on trust reflected in personal feelings and manifestations of related expressive and cognitive functions. The expressive function is revealed as openness toward and trust in others. The cognitive function involves propensities to speak thoughts openly; to risk being wrong and awkward as the team explores issues and alternatives. A reluctance to engage in open expression and regression toward more instrumental behaviors may be expected in teams where there is marginal confidence among members in terms of other's trustworthiness (Bensimon & Neumann, 1993; Jones & George, 1998).

Proposition 6. Affective states and knowledge structures of team members encompassing thoughts and feelings, including those related to trust and trustworthiness, can define the mode of interactions in teams.

DISCUSSION

Many of the assumptions about trust in organizations, although minimally empirically tested, appear to support a rational perspective where the decision to trust others is predicated on "encapsulated interest" (Hardin, 1993); that is, an estimate of the likelihood that others will reciprocate. Motives for trusting, in many instances, are decidedly instrumental, calculative, and/or expectation based. In contrast, social models of trust suggest that trust is a significant element in organizations only where there are close interpersonal relationships (Tyler & Degoey, 1998). Here, motivational and affective dimensions of trust are paramount.

Research on rational and social models of trust in collective action, in the aggregate, suggest the validity of the tenet that decisions about trust, at least to some degree, turn upon calculation (Kramer, Brewer, & Hanna, 1998). Nonetheless, there is convincing support for the position that successful collective action continues to depend, at least in part, on trust among individuals in voluntary activities targeted to the achievement of collective purposes (Elster, 1989; Olson, 1965). Our propositions suggest the utility of both instrumental and noninstrumental views, and the need to conceptually integrate these perspectives as we seek to better understand this complex phenomenon in the context of team-based systems of restructured schools.

In our necessarily limited consideration of the complex phenomenon of trust in restructured schools, we have focused on interpersonal and team relationships. Less attention has been given to structural dimensions of organization in which trust is embedded. In restructured schools -- organic systems that exhibit high levels of task interdependence and horizontal communication, and are characterized by decentralization of control and authority (Burns & Stalker, 1994) -- trust benefits from the flexibility and adaptive features that distinguish organizations that operate within fluid social environments. Strong, coherent, mechanistic organizational forms, in contrast, may actually deter the development of high levels of trust.

Under-regulated forms of organization, we suggest, may be more effective, although less efficient, in producing and sustaining high levels of trust. Research should explore the extent to which restructured school organizations may operate to reduce uncertainty, absorb risks, and reliably enable the development of trust, teamwork, and collective action.

The key term, here, is "reliability." Great schools, like great companies, do not remain in

lasting states of attainment. Both must "struggle mightily to sustain their vitality and to adapt appropriately" to the challenges of their internal and external environments (Pascale, 1990, p. 35). Individuals and school constituencies can expect to derive benefits from collective trust only as long as it can be sustained. Collective trust can endure as long as teachers, administrators, parents, and community members -- partners in local schools -- work together under the assumptions that collective behaviors are rational, and their collective fate and interests are coupled.

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